

# On the road to reconstruction

**Bagram Provincial Reconstruction Team helps build bridges, roads and schools**

*by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.*

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**W**hat did you do this summer? Tech. Sgt. Charles Campbell intercepted a group of nomadic Kuchi people during their migration through the Panjshir Valley so he could medically treat the families as they moved their livestock to the high country.

Staff Sgt. Eric Mathiasen dodged around unexploded ordnance in Tarin Kowt to check the status of a teammate after a suicide bomber slammed and ignited a missile-laden vehicle into a Humvee.

First Lt. Chris White helped an Afghan village dedicate a new micro-hydro power station that will provide electricity to a police station.

Over their “summer vacation” members of provincial reconstruction teams can say they helped rebuild Afghanistan, a nation that has suffered a civil war, a Soviet Union occupation, a brutal take-over by

the Taliban government, drought and the destruction of much of its infrastructure and institutions.

When Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld visited Qalat in July, he called the provincial reconstruction teams a shining example of the relationships necessary to assist the Afghan government.

“It’s not an easy task to rebuild after this,” the secretary said. “It takes time; it takes leadership; it takes courage; and it takes the cooperation of leaders such as the governor working with the international community to find ways that are appropriate to assist the people of Afghanistan.”

## **How they do it**

There are 13 provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan. They perform security, governmental interfacing with provincial governors, by Senior Airman Brain Ferguson



**Army Maj. Don Johnson chats** (left) with an Afghan boy on the streets of Bamian, Afghanistan, during a provincial reconstruction team visit. Alongside is Lt. Col. Donald Koehler, Bagram PRT commander, left, and Army Sgt. Otis Fulton. Members of the Bagram team and the 102nd Infantry Battalion (above) go over convoy security procedures before departing for the Parwan province.





**Winding their way** through a mountain pass, members of the Bagram Provincial Reconstruction Team make their way to a remote village in Afghanistan.

by Senior Airman Brian Ferguson



and lead the reconstruction efforts in their assigned province. Seven are led by the Air Force, which became involved this year when the Army asked for help in the way of a request for forces.

Because they cater to the needs of the local government, each PRT is different.

For instance, medics on various teams will focus on different aspects of their specialty. In Qalat, Staff Sgt. Michael Ball teaches Afghan National Army soldiers emergency medical care.

"These ANA medics come into contact with the Taliban just about every night," said Sergeant Ball, an emergency medical technician deployed from Pope Air Force Base, N.C. "They need the skills to take care of their own wounded. It's critically important for them to have these skills."

In Tarin Kowt, it's the PRT that gets attacked. So, medic Sergeant Mathiasen's job is more focused on being prepared to provide critical care to team members and treat local Afghans when needed. On May 1, the medic was riding in a Humvee in the middle of a PRT convoy

when a suicide bomber in a car crashed into the vehicle directly ahead of him and detonated a cache of missile heads. The Sergeant avoided the two or three unexploded ordnance that lay littered on the road and, fortunately, the Soldier he examined didn't have life-threatening injuries. Sergeant Mathiasen is deployed from Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

In Panjshir Province, Sergeant Campbell, a medic deployed from Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., made a house call to Afghan nomads.

"We needed to set up a bag geared more toward family medicine versus emergency medicine," he said.

Sergeant Ball, Sergeant Mathiasen and Sergeant Campbell are all in the same career field, but many times find themselves focusing on different aspects of their profession.

#### **Common factor - road trips**

A common factor of all teams is convoys. They are like traveling salesmen, and the service they're selling is peace and stability in the region.

**Tech. Sgt. Michael Ball and assistant instructor** and translator Sayed Kabir review the Emergency Medical Technician final exam with Afghan National Army members. The soldiers took the eight-week EMT course at the Qalat Provincial Reconstruction Team's trade school. The course teaches students medical and driving skills.

In a year, the Qalat team safely ventured "outside the wire" 284 times. They must risk the dangers of convoy travel to promote good governance and facilitate reconstruction and economic growth by working with local the governor on projects.

"It's all dirt roads and goat trails," said Lt. Col. Kevin McGlaughlin, the Qalat PRT commander. "It's mountainous and difficult to get around."

So another goal for the teams is to build roads so the local people can get to hospitals.

The dirt roads in the remote regions of Afghanistan are really just wide trails carved in the sides of mountain cliffs, winding their way





**Republic of Korea engineer Capt. Jae Ho Han** inspects a bridge under construction in Afghanistan. While a project is under construction, teams will intermittently visit to check on its progress.

through canyons. Like goats, vehicles and colorful jingle trucks butt heads as they try to pass each other on the single-lane roadways. For the Bagram team, convoys can stretch into four-day forays. The team travels like a band of gypsies, going from town to town. They stay where they can, and stop at villages with military precision. The team's doctor, Capt. Dave Burns, evaluated a town's clinic while team members unloaded medical supplies. At the same time, security forces team member Staff Sgt. Michael Myers met with the chief of police while the team chief, Army Maj. Don Johnson, talked with the local mayor. During that same time, two Republic of Korea engineers, Captains Byung-wook Moon and Jai-ho Han, inspected a construction site. Like the Bagram team, many teams are composed of coalition troops.

As per PRT standards, a province's governor is the lead agent for all reconstruction projects. The team helps fund projects and checks the quality of a contractor's work during the actual building phase of construction. The contractor hires local villagers to do much of the construction, which adds a sense of pride and ownership of the facility. During a one-year tour, Bagram team members will visit a particular village on average about eight times. On the road about five times a week, they return to remote villages about every six weeks.

**Change is taking place**

For the Air Force, PRT involvement falls on the 755th Expeditionary Mission Support Group at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. These Airmen are involved with seven of the 13 coalition PRTs throughout the country.

Plans call for all the PRTs to be turned over to the International Security Assistance Forces. Until that happens, the Air Force still needs volunteers to fill the one-year PRT positions. Airmen are needed in supply, security forces, communications, administration, personnel, civil engineering, information operations, intelligence and operations. Before Secretary Rumsfeld left Afghanistan, he spoke to members of the PRT. "All of you decided that this was important to serve your country," he said. "You're here doing it, and you're doing it successfully. You can all be darn proud that you're doing it, for the rest of your lives." 🦅

— Capt. Mark Gibson, Capt. Joe Campbell and Army Sgt. Sara Wood contributed to this article

photo by Army Spc. Michael Zuk



**Bagram Provincial Reconstruction Team Commander Lt. Col. Donald Koehler** and Afghan Gov. Jabar Taqwa of the Parwan province cut the ribbon at a newly built school in Charikar, Afghanistan.

# The ABCs of pRT

The provincial reconstruction teams' efforts in Afghanistan are so successful Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice used them as a template to inaugurate the first U.S.-led PRT in Iraq in November. While addressing the Senate Committee of Foreign Relations last fall, Secretary Rice said, "To execute our strategy we will restructure a portion of the U.S. mission in Iraq. Learning from successful precedents used in Afghanistan, we will deploy provincial reconstruction teams in key parts of the country." The coalition effort to secure and rebuild a post-Taliban Afghanistan has been the PRT's mission from the start. A mix of civilian, U.S. military and coalition members compose teams that try to promote conditions for self-sufficiency, enduring prosperity and a secure, stable environment. The Army created PRTs during Operation Enduring Freedom in early 2002. These teams assessed humanitarian needs, implemented small reconstruction projects and established relations with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and nongovernmental organizations already in the field. Late in 2002, the United States expanded the program by creating the first PRTs. This time, force protection and representatives of U.S. government civilian agencies joined the teams. The U.S. Embassy in Kabul issued a general set of parameters that established the PRT objectives, which are being followed to this day. Those principles include extending the authority of the Afghan central government, improving security and promoting reconstruction.

The first PRTs stationed themselves in hot spots where no relief organizations dared tread. Their presence deterred insurgents and criminals who had been active in those areas. After securing an area, the PRTs handed the area over to NATO-run International Security Assistance Forces. A byproduct of security will be the return of international relief organizations, many of whom left in 2005 because of deadly attacks on volunteers. The Air Force became involved in 2006 at the request of the Army, called a Request For Forces. Airmen would assist with the Army mission, much like helping with convoy duties in Iraq. It is anyone's guess how long the PRT mission will continue in Afghanistan. A near-term goal is to transfer all PRT functions to the International Security Assistance Forces to make it truly an international mission. What is certain is the Air Force needs more Airmen to volunteer for the one-year tours. If interested, check for openings on the Air Force Personnel Center Web site <http://ask.afpc.randolph.af.mil/>.